

CLAIMS

1. Software for use on a client device that is configured for communications with a multiplicity of other client devices via a communications network, comprising:

a communications function that effects:

a send e-mail communication link between the client device and an e-mail service provider server system via the communications network whenever the user desires to send e-mail messages;

a receive e-mail communication link between the client device and the e-mail service provider system whenever the user desires to check for received e-mail messages; and

an advertisement download communication link between the client device and an advertisement distribution server system via the communications system, at selected advertisement download times;

an e-mail composition function for enabling a user of the client device to compose e-mail messages;

an e-mail send function that enables the user to send e-mail messages to other client devices via the send e-mail communication link;

an e-mail receive function that enables the user to receive e-mail messages from other client devices via the receive e-mail communication link; and

an advertisement download function that downloads advertisements from the advertisement distribution server system via the advertisement download communication link;

wherein the e-mail service provider server system and the advertisement distribution server system are separately controlled.

2 2. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the advertisement distribution
server system is controlled by a vendor of the software.

2 3. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the communications network
comprises the Internet.

2 4. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the e-mail service provider
system comprises a first e-mail service provider server system for storing and
forwarding outgoing e-mail messages, and a second e-mail service provider server
4 system for storing and forwarding incoming e-mail messages.

2 5. The software as set forth in Claim 4, wherein the first and second e-mail
service provider server systems are the same.

2 6. The software as set forth in Claim 4, wherein the first and second e-mail
service provider systems are separate.

2 7. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software is e-mail service
provider-independent.

2 8. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the selected advertisement
download times include times when the client device is online for the purpose of
sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

2 9. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising a viewer function
that enables the user to read e-mail messages when the client device is offline with
respect to the e-mail service provider server system.

10. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:

2 an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on
a persistent storage medium within the client device; and

4 an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of
the stored advertisements.

11. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:

2 an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on
a storage medium within the client device; and

4 an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of
the stored advertisements, while the user is composing and/or reading e-mail
6 messages.

12. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the advertisement display
2 function controls the display of the stored advertisements in accordance with ad
display parameters prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system,
4 which ad display parameters are unknown to the e-mail service provider.

13. The software as set forth in Claim 12, further comprising a user activity
2 monitor function that is activated when the software is operating in the first
operating mode, wherein the user activity monitor function generates user activity
4 information that is used by the advertisement display function in controlling a
duration for which advertisements are displayed.

14. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software is subsidized by
2 revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

15. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the advertisement download
2 function does not mandate that the selected advertisement download times have a

one-to-one correspondence with times when the client device is online for the
4 purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

16. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein:

2 the send e-mail communication link and the receive e-mail communication
link can be the same communication link or different communication links; and

4 the advertisement download communication link is not the same
communication link as either the send e-mail communication link or the receive e-
6 mail communication link.

17. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the selected advertisement
2 download times comprise times when the client device is online for purposes other
than sending e-mail messages or checking for received e-mail messages.

18. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the e-mail service provider is
2 an Internet Service Provider.

19. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software is compatible
2 with a plurality of e-mail service providers.

20. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software is not tied to a
2 particular e-mail service provider.

21. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software is operational
2 across a plurality of different e-mail systems.

22. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the e-mail service provider
2 system and the advertisement distribution server system do not communicate with
one another.

23. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the e-mail service provider system and the advertisement distribution server system are not coupled to one another.

24. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the e-mail service provider system and the advertisement distribution server system are not interconnected.

25. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the e-mail service provider system and the advertisement distribution server system do not function in a cooperative manner.

26. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the e-mail service provider system and the advertisement distribution server system are uncoordinated.

27. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising a custom installer function that generates a distributor ID that identifies a distributor that distributed the software for use on the client device.

28. The software as set forth in Claim 27, further comprising a client information transmit function that transmits the distributor ID to a prescribed server to be used in apportioning advertising revenue attributable to the software distributed by that distributor.

29. The software as set forth in Claim 28, wherein the prescribed server is associated with the advertisement distribution server system.

30. The software as set forth in Claim 28, wherein the distributor is an Internet Service Provider.

31. The software as set forth in Claim 28, wherein the distributor is an e-mail
2 service provider.

32. The software as set forth in Claim 31, wherein the e-mail service provider
2 is an Internet Service Provider.

33. The software as set forth in Claim 27, further comprising a client
2 information transmit function that transmits the distributor ID to a prescribed server
operated by the producer of the software to be used by the producer of the software
4 in apportioning advertising revenue attributable to copies of the software distributed
by that distributor.

34. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the advertisement
2 distribution server system includes:

a plurality of ad servers, each of which stores one or more of a plurality of
4 advertisements to be downloaded, each advertisement being stored in a storage
location designated by a URI; and

6 at least one playlist server which one of stores and generates at least one
playlist, each playlist containing a list of ad identifiers and corresponding URIs that
8 identify respective advertisements to be downloaded, and the corresponding storage
location from which each respective advertisement can be fetched.

35. The software as set forth in Claim 34, wherein the advertisement download
2 function includes:

a client device playlist identification function that transmits an identification
4 of a current playlist(s) currently being used by the client device to the at least one
playlist server at prescribed playlist check intervals, wherein the at least one playlist
6 server responds either by transmitting to the client device an indication that the

current playlist(s) does not need to be augmented, or by transmitting to the client
8 device at least one new playlist; and

a playlist comparison function that compares the ad identifiers listed in the
10 current playlist(s) with the ad identifiers listed in the at least one new playlist, and
that generates a list of URIs of the advertisements corresponding to the ad identifiers
12 in the at least one new playlist that are different from the ad identifiers in the current
playlist(s); and

14 an ad fetch function that fetches the advertisements corresponding to the
generated list of URIs from the appropriate one(s) of the plurality of ad servers, over
16 one or more advertisement download sessions.

36. The software as set forth in Claim 35, wherein the one or more
2 advertisement download sessions coincide with the selected advertisement
download times.

37. The software as set forth in Claim 36, wherein the selected advertisement
2 download times span a plurality of online e-mail sessions during which the client
device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

38. The software as set forth in Claim 36, wherein each of the prescribed
2 playlist check intervals correspond to the first time that the client device goes online
for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages subsequent to the lapse
4 of the current prescribed playlist check interval.

39. The software as set forth in Claim 38, wherein the advertisement download
2 function further includes an ad fetch timer function that limits the duration of each
advertisement download session to a prescribed maximum time period.

40. The software as set forth in Claim 36, wherein the prescribed playlist check intervals span a plurality of online e-mail sessions during which the client device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

41. The software as set forth in Claim 37, wherein the selected advertisement download times coincide with times when the client device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

42. The software as set forth in Claim 35, further comprising a playlist merge function that merges the current playlist(s) and the at least one new playlist.

43. The software as set forth in Claim 35, further comprising an ad deletion function that deletes from storage on the client device all advertisements corresponding to the ad identifiers in the current playlist(s) that are not contained in the at least one new playlist.

44. The software as set forth in Claim 35, wherein each advertisement download session is limited to a prescribed maximum time duration.

45. The software as set forth in Claim 35, wherein the advertisement download function further includes an ad fetch timer function that limits the duration of each advertisement download session to a prescribed maximum time period.

46. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on a persistent storage medium within the client device.

47. The software as set forth in Claim 46, further comprising an advertisement display function for displaying the stored advertisements on the client device.

48. The software as set forth in Claim 47, wherein the advertisements comprise
2 advertisement files each of which includes an advertisement and a plurality of ad
display parameters associated with that advertisement.

49. The software as set forth in Claim 48, wherein the advertisement display
2 function displays the stored advertisements according to the ad display parameters.

50. The software as set forth in Claim 49, wherein the advertisement download
2 function downloads separate portions of a single advertisement file over two or more
advertisement download sessions.

51. The software as set forth in Claim 50, wherein each advertisement includes
2 an image.

52. The software as set forth in Claim 51, wherein each image comprises a GIF
2 image.

53. The software as set forth in Claim 50, wherein each image comprises a
2 PNG image.

54. The software as set forth in Claim 50, wherein each image comprises a
2 JPEG image.

55. The software as set forth in Claim 49, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each
4 time that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be
6 displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to
8 be displayed;

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
10 displayed; and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
12 displayed.

56. The software as set forth in Claim 49, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include at least one of the following parameters:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each
4 time that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be
6 displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to
8 be displayed;

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
10 displayed; and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
12 displayed.

57. The software as set forth in Claim 49, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include at least two of the following parameters:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each
4 time that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be
6 displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to
8 be displayed;

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
10 displayed; and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
12 displayed.

58. The software as set forth in Claim 49, wherein the advertisements include
2 main screen advertisements and toolbar advertisements.

59. The software as set forth in Claim 58, wherein the ad display parameters
2 associated with each of the toolbar advertisements include:

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
4 displayed; and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
6 displayed.

60. The software as set forth in Claim 48, wherein the advertisement download
2 function downloads separate portions of a single advertisement file over two or more
advertisement download sessions.

61. The software as set forth in Claim 48, wherein each advertisement includes
2 an image.

62. The software as set forth in Claim 61, wherein each image comprises one of
2 a GIF image, a PNG image, and a JPEG image.

63. The software as set forth in Claim 48, wherein each advertisement includes
2 an image.

2 64. The software as set forth in Claim 63, wherein each image comprises one of
a GIF image, a PNG image, and a JPEG image.

2 65. The software as set forth in Claim 47, wherein the advertisements comprise
advertisement files each of which includes an advertisement.

2 66. The software as set forth in Claim 65, wherein the advertisement download
function downloads separate portions of a single advertisement file over two or more
advertisement download sessions.

2 67. The software as set forth in Claim 65, wherein each advertisement includes
an image.

2 68. The software as set forth in Claim 67, wherein each image comprises one of
a GIF image, a PNG image, and a JPEG image.

2 69. The software as set forth in Claim 47, wherein the advertisement display
function controls the display of the stored advertisements in accordance with ad
display parameters prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system.

2 70. The software as set forth in Claim 69, wherein the ad display parameters
include:

4 the maximum time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed each time
that it is displayed;

6 the maximum cumulative time that each stored advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the maximum number of times per day that each stored advertisement is to be
displayed;

the start date/time before which each stored advertisement should not be
10 displayed; and

the end date/time after which each stored advertisement should not be
12 displayed.

71. The software as set forth in Claim 69, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include at least one of the following:

the maximum time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed each time
4 that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that each stored advertisement is to be
6 displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that each stored advertisement is to be
8 displayed;

the start date/time before which each stored advertisement should not be
10 displayed; and

the end date/time after which each stored advertisement should not be
12 displayed.

72. The software as set forth in Claim 69, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include at least two of the following:

the maximum time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed each time
4 that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that each stored advertisement is to be
6 displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that each stored advertisement is to be
8 displayed;

the start date/time before which each stored advertisement should not be
10 displayed; and

the end date/time after which each stored advertisement should not be
12 displayed.

73. The software as set forth in Claim 69, wherein the advertisements include
2 main screen advertisements and toolbar advertisements.

74. The software as set forth in Claim 73, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include the following parameters associated with each of the toolbar advertisements:

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
4 displayed; and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
6 displayed.

75. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an installer
2 function for installing the software on a computer-readable storage medium.

76. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an installer
2 function for installing the software on the client device.

77. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an installer
2 function for installing the software on a computer-readable storage medium
associated with the client device.

78. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software includes at least
2 two operating modes, including a first operating mode in which the advertisement
download function is activated, and a second operating mode in which the
4 advertisement download function is not activated.

79. The software as set forth in Claim 78, wherein the software includes a first
2 set of e-mail features when operating in the first operating mode, and a second set of
e-mail features when operating in the second operating mode, wherein the first set of
4 e-mail features is greater than the second set of e-mail features.

80. The software as set forth in Claim 79, further comprising a deadbeat user
2 determination function that is activated when the software is operating in the first
operating mode, wherein the deadbeat user determination function determines
4 compliance with a prescribed ad display policy, and switches the operating mode of
the software from the first operating mode to the second operating mode in response
6 to determining non-compliance with the prescribed ad display policy.

81. The software as set forth in Claim 79, further comprising an adware nag
2 function that is activated when the software is operating in the second operating
mode, wherein the adware nag function generates an adware nag display that
4 prompts the user to switch from the second operating mode to the first operating
mode.

82. The software as set forth in Claim 81, wherein the software is advertiser-
2 subsidized when operating in the first operating mode, and is not advertiser-
subsidized when operating in the second operating mode.

83. The software as set forth in Claim 81, wherein the adware nag function
2 generates the adware nag display at prescribed intervals for at least a prescribed
period of time.

84. The software as set forth in Claim 81, wherein the adware nag display
2 comprises an adware nag window that is displayed on a display device associated
with the client device.

85. The software as set forth in Claim 84, wherein the adware nag window
2 comprises a modeless window.

86. The software as set forth in Claim 79, further comprising a mode switching
2 function for switching between the first and second operating modes.

87. The software as set forth in Claim 86, wherein the software is advertiser-
2 subsidized when operating in the first operating mode, and is not advertiser-
subsidized when operating in the second operating mode.

88. The software as set forth in Claim 79, wherein the default operating mode
2 of the software is the first operating mode.

89. The software as set forth in Claim 88, further comprising a selector
2 function that enables the user to select between the first and second operating modes.

90. The software as set forth in Claim 79, further comprising:
2 a selector function that enables the user to select between the first and second
operating modes; and
4 a downgrade dialog function that is activated in response to the user selecting
the second operating mode when the current operating mode of the software is the
6 first operating mode, wherein the downgrade dialog function generates a dialog that
is displayed on a display device associated with the client device to prompt the user
8 to remain in the current operating mode.

91. The software as set forth in Claim 90, wherein the dialog includes a list of
2 at least some of the e-mail features that are included when the software is operating
in the current operating mode that will not be included when the software is
4 operated in the second operating mode.

92. The software as set forth in Claim 79, further comprising:

an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on a storage medium associated with the client device; and
an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of the stored advertisements.

93. The software as set forth in Claim 92, further comprising:

an advertisement download monitor function that is activated when the software is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement download monitor function determines whether or not an ad download failure condition has occurred, whereby the ad download failure condition occurs when the advertisement download function has not successfully downloaded advertisements over a prescribed time period; and

an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the first operating mode upon detection that an ad download failure condition has occurred, whereupon the adware failure nag function generates an adware nag failure display that notifies the user that advertisements have not been successfully downloaded, and that warns the user that the operating mode of the software will be switched from the first operating mode to the second operating mode if the ad download failure condition is not rectified.

94. The software as set forth in Claim 93, further comprising a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

95. The software as set forth in Claim 92, further comprising:

an advertisement download monitor function that is activated when the software is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement download monitor function determines whether or not an ad download failure condition has

occurred, whereby the ad download failure condition occurs when the advertisement
6 download function has not successfully downloaded advertisements over a
prescribed time period; and

8 an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad download failure condition has
10 occurred, whereupon the adware failure nag function generates an adware nag
failure display at prescribed ad failure nag intervals, wherein the adware nag failure
12 display notifies the user that advertisements have not been successfully downloaded,
and warns the user that the operating mode of the software will be switched from the
14 first operating mode to the second operating mode if the ad download failure
condition is not rectified.

96. The software as set forth in Claim 95, wherein the prescribed ad failure nag
2 intervals decrease over a time span between the initial detection of the ad download
failure condition and the expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

97. The software as set forth in Claim 96, further comprising a mode switching
2 function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the second
operating mode upon expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

98. The software as set forth in Claim 96, further comprising:

2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode
4 switch alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from
the first operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes
6 immediate corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

99. The software as set forth in Claim 95, further comprising a mode switching
2 function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the second
operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

100. The software as set forth in Claim 95, further comprising:

2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
4 alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first
operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes immediate
6 corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

101. The software as set forth in Claim 93, further comprising:

2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
4 alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first
operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes immediate
6 corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
2 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

102. The software as set forth in Claim 92, further comprising:

2 an advertisement download monitor function that is activated when the
software is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement download
4 monitor function determines whether or not an ad download failure condition has
occurred, whereby the ad download failure condition occurs when the advertisement

6 download function has not successfully downloaded advertisements over a
prescribed time period;

8 an e-mail function monitor function that determines whether or not an e-mail
function failure condition has occurred, whereby the e-mail failure condition occurs
10 when the software has not successfully sent and/or received e-mail messages over
the prescribed time period; and

12 an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad download failure condition has
14 occurred and an e-mail function failure condition has not occurred, whereupon the
adware failure nag function generates an adware nag failure display that notifies the
16 user that advertisements have not been successfully downloaded, and that warns the
user that the operating mode of the software will be switched from the first operating
18 mode to the second operating mode if the ad download failure condition is not
rectified.

103. The software as set forth in Claim 102, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

104. The software as set forth in Claim 102, further comprising:

2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
4 alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first
operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes immediate
6 corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

105. The software as set forth in Claim 92, further comprising:

2 an advertisement download monitor function that is activated when the
software is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement download
4 monitor function determines whether or not an ad download failure condition has
occurred, whereby the ad download failure condition occurs when the advertisement
6 download function has not successfully downloaded advertisements over a
prescribed time period;

8 an e-mail function monitor function that determines whether or not an e-mail
function failure condition has occurred, whereby the e-mail failure condition occurs
10 when the software has not successfully sent and/or received e-mail messages over
the prescribed time period; and

12 an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad download failure condition has
14 occurred and an e-mail function failure condition has not occurred, whereupon the
adware failure nag function generates an adware nag failure display at prescribed ad
16 failure nag intervals, wherein the adware nag failure display notifies the user that
advertisements have not been successfully downloaded, and warns the user that the
18 operating mode of the software will be switched from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode if the ad download failure condition is not rectified.

106. The software as set forth in Claim 105, wherein the prescribed ad failure
2 nag intervals decrease over a time span between the initial detection of the ad
download failure condition and the expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure
4 time period.

107. The software as set forth in Claim 106, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

108. The software as set forth in Claim 105, further comprising a mode
switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time
period.

109. The software as set forth in Claim 105, further comprising:
a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first
operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes immediate
corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and
a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

110. The software as set forth in Claim 79, further comprising:
an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on
a storage medium associated with the client device;
an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of
the stored advertisements ;
an obscured ad monitor function that determines whether an obscured ad
condition has occurred, whereby the obscured ad condition occurs when an
advertisement currently being displayed on a display screen associated with the
client device is being obscured by one or more other items currently being displayed
on the display screen; and
an obscured ad nag function that generates an obscured ad nag display in
response to detection of the obscured ad condition, wherein the obscured ad nag
display notifies the user of the obscured ad condition.

111. The software as set forth in Claim 79, further comprising:

2 a software update check function that checks a prescribed website to
determine availability of an update(s) to the software; and

4 a nag function that generates a software update nag display in response to a
determination that an update(s) to the software is available, wherein the update(s)
6 that the user is entitled to vary depending upon which operating mode is currently
activated.

112. The software as set forth in Claim 78, wherein the software provides
2 enhanced functionality when operating in the first operating mode relative to its
functionality when operating in the second operating mode.

113. The software as set forth in Claim 112, further comprising a mode
2 switching function for switching between the first and second operating modes.

114. The software as set forth in Claim 113, wherein the software is advertiser-
2 subsidized when operating in the first operating mode, and is not advertiser-
subsidized when operating in the second operating mode.

115. The software as set forth in Claim 112, wherein the default operating
2 mode of the software is the first operating mode.

116. The software as set forth in Claim 115, further comprising a selector
2 function that enables the user to select between the first and second operating modes.

117. The software as set forth in Claim 78, wherein:

2 the software includes a first set of e-mail features when operating in the first
operating mode, and a second set of e-mail features when operating in the second
4 operating mode;

the first set of e-mail features is greater than the second set of e-mail features;
6 the software defaults to the first operating mode; and
the software is freely switchable from the first operating mode to the second
8 operating mode and from the second operating mode to the first operating mode.

118. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software includes at
2 least three operating modes, including:

a first operating mode in which the advertisement download function is
4 activated;

a second operating mode in which the advertisement download function is
6 not activated;

a third operating mode in which the advertisement download function is not
8 activated;

wherein the software includes an enhanced set of e-mail features when
10 operating in either the first or third operating mode, and includes a reduced set of e-mail features when operating in the second operating mode; and

wherein the software is free when operating in either the first or second
12 operating mode, but must be paid for when operating in the third operating mode.

119. The software as set forth in Claim 118, further comprising a mode
2 switching function for switching between the first, second, and third operating modes.

120. The software as set forth in Claim 118, wherein the default operating
2 mode is the first operating mode.

121. The software as set forth in Claim 118, further comprising a deadbeat user
2 determination function that is activated when the software is operating in the first operating mode, wherein the deadbeat user determination function determines

4 compliance with a prescribed ad display policy, and switches the operating mode of
the software from the first operating mode to the second operating mode in response
6 to determining non-compliance with the prescribed ad display policy.

122. The software as set forth in Claim 118, further comprising a selector
2 function that enables the user to select between the first, second, and third operating
modes.

123. The software as set forth in Claim 122, further comprising a mode
2 switching function for switching between the first, second, and third operating
modes.

124. The software as set forth in Claim 122, further comprising a refund
2 facilitator function that generates a refund code in response to the user switching
from the third operating mode to the first operating mode, wherein the user can use
4 the refund code to obtain a refund from a vendor of the software.

125. The software as set forth in Claim 124, wherein the refund facilitator
2 function further generates a display window that notifies the user of the refund code.

126. The software as set forth in Claim 124, wherein the refund facilitator
2 function further generates a display window that presents the user with the option to
finalize the switch to the first operating mode, or to cancel the switch to the first
4 operating mode.

127. The software as set forth in Claim 124, wherein the refund facilitator
2 function further generates:
a first display window that notifies the user of the refund code; and

4 a second display window that presents the user with the option to finalize the
switch to the first operating mode, or to cancel the switch to the first operating mode.

128. The software as set forth in Claim 118, further comprising an adware nag
2 function that is activated when the software is operating in the second operating
mode, wherein the adware nag function generates an adware nag display that
4 prompts the user to switch from the second operating mode to the first operating
mode.

129. The software as set forth in Claim 128, wherein the software is advertiser-
2 subsidized when operating in the first operating mode, and is not advertiser-
subsidized when operating in the second operating mode.

130. The software as set forth in Claim 128, wherein the adware nag function
2 generates the adware nag display at prescribed intervals for at least a prescribed
period of time.

131. The software as set forth in Claim 128, wherein the adware nag display
2 comprises an adware nag window that is displayed on a display device associated
with the client device.

132. The software as set forth in Claim 131, wherein the adware nag window
2 comprises a modeless window.

133. The software as set forth in Claim 118, further comprising:
2 a selector function that enables the user to select between the first, second, and
third operating modes; and
4 a downgrade dialog function that is activated in response to the user selecting
the second operating mode when the current operating mode of the software is either

6 the first or third operating mode, wherein the downgrade dialog function generates a
dialog that is displayed on a display device associated with the client device to
8 prompt the user to either remain in the current operating mode, or to switch instead
to the other of the first and third operating modes.

134. The software as set forth in Claim 133, wherein the dialog includes a list
2 of at least some of the e-mail features that are included when the software is
operating in the current operating mode that will not be included when the software
4 is operated in the second operating mode.

135. The software as set forth in Claim 118, further comprising:
2 an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on
a storage medium associated with the client device; and
4 an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of
the stored advertisements.

136. The software as set forth in Claim 135, further comprising:
2 an advertisement download monitor function that is activated when the
software is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement download
4 monitor function determines whether or not an ad download failure condition has
occurred, whereby the ad download failure condition occurs when the advertisement
6 download function has not successfully downloaded advertisements over a
prescribed time period; and
8 an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad download failure condition has
10 occurred, whereupon the adware failure nag function generates an adware nag
failure display that notifies the user that advertisements have not been successfully
12 downloaded, and that warns the user that the operating mode of the software will be

switched from the first operating mode to the second operating mode if the ad
download failure condition is not rectified.

137. The software as set forth in Claim 135, further comprising:

an advertisement download monitor function that is activated when the software is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement download monitor function determines whether or not an ad download failure condition has occurred, whereby the ad download failure condition occurs when the advertisement download function has not successfully downloaded advertisements over a prescribed time period; and

an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the first operating mode upon detection that an ad download failure condition has occurred, whereupon the adware failure nag function generates an adware nag failure display at prescribed ad failure nag intervals, wherein the adware nag failure display notifies the user that advertisements have not been successfully downloaded, and warns the user that the operating mode of the software will be switched from the first operating mode to the second operating mode if the ad download failure condition is not rectified.

138. The software as set forth in Claim 137, wherein the ad download failure condition is declared when e-mail messages have been successfully received but advertisements have not been successfully downloaded over the prescribed time period.

139. The software as set forth in Claim 137, wherein the prescribed ad failure nag intervals decrease over a time span between the initial detection of the ad download failure condition and the expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

140. The software as set forth in Claim 139, further comprising a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the

second operating mode upon expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

141. The software as set forth in Claim 139, further comprising:

2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode
4 switch alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from
the first operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes
6 immediate corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

142. The software as set forth in Claim 137, further comprising:

2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
4 alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first
operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes immediate
6 corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

143. The software as set forth in Claim 137, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

144. The software as set forth in Claim 136, further comprising a mode
switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time
period.

145. The software as set forth in Claim 136, further comprising:
a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first
operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes immediate
corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and
a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

146. The software as set forth in Claim 135, further comprising:
an advertisement download monitor function that is activated when the
software is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement download
monitor function determines whether or not an ad download failure condition has
occurred, whereby the ad download failure condition occurs when the advertisement
download function has not successfully downloaded advertisements over a
prescribed time period;
an e-mail function monitor function that determines whether or not an e-mail
function failure condition has occurred, whereby the e-mail failure condition occurs
when the software has not successfully sent and/or received e-mail messages over
the prescribed time period; and
an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad download failure condition has
occurred and an e-mail function failure condition has not occurred, whereupon the

adware failure nag function generates an adware nag failure display that notifies the user that advertisements have not been successfully downloaded, and that warns the user that the operating mode of the software will be switched from the first operating mode to the second operating mode if the ad download failure condition is not rectified.

147. The software as set forth in Claim 146, further comprising a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

148. The software as set forth in Claim 146, further comprising:
a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes immediate corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and
a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective action in response to the mode switch alert display.

149. The software as set forth in Claim 135, further comprising:
an advertisement download monitor function that is activated when the software is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement download monitor function determines whether or not an ad download failure condition has occurred, whereby the ad download failure condition occurs when the advertisement download function has not successfully downloaded advertisements over a prescribed time period;

8 an e-mail function monitor function that determines whether or not an e-mail
function failure condition has occurred, whereby the e-mail failure condition occurs
10 when the software has not successfully sent and/or received e-mail messages over
the prescribed time period; and

12 an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad download failure condition has
14 occurred and an e-mail function failure condition has not occurred, whereupon the
adware failure nag function generates an adware nag failure display at prescribed ad
16 failure nag intervals, wherein the adware nag failure display notifies the user that
advertisements have not been successfully downloaded, and warns the user that the
18 operating mode of the software will be switched from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode if the ad download failure condition is not rectified.

150. The software as set forth in Claim 149, wherein the prescribed ad failure
2 nag intervals decrease over a time span between the initial detection of the ad
download failure condition and the expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure
4 time period.

151. The software as set forth in Claim 150, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

152. The software as set forth in Claim 149, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

153. The software as set forth in Claim 149, further comprising:

2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
4 alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first
operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes immediate
6 corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

154. The software as set forth in Claim 149, wherein the adware failure nag
2 function includes a counter function that is incremented by one each day that
advertisements are not successfully downloaded subsequent to initial detection of an
4 ad download failure condition, and is decremented by one each time it is determined
by the advertisement download monitor function that advertisements have been
6 successfully downloaded for a prescribed period of time.

155. The software as set forth in Claim 154, wherein the prescribed period of
2 time is two days.

156. The software as set forth in Claim 154, wherein the counter function has
2 two terminal conditions, including a first terminal condition which occurs when it is
decremented to zero, in which case the adware failure nag function is de-activated,
4 and a second terminal condition which occurs when it is incremented to a prescribed
terminal count.

157. The software as set forth in Claim 156, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode in response to the second terminal condition of the counter
4 function.

158. The software as set forth in Claim 156, wherein the prescribed terminal
count corresponds to a prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

159. The software as set forth in Claim 158, further comprising a mode
switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time
period.

160. The software as set forth in Claim 158, further comprising:
a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode
switch alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from
the first operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes
immediate corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and
a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective
action in response to the mode switch alert display.

161. The software as set forth in Claim 118, further comprising:
an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on
a storage medium associated with the client device;
an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of
the stored advertisements ;
an obscured ad monitor function that determines whether an obscured ad
condition has occurred, whereby the obscured ad condition occurs when an
advertisement currently being displayed on a display screen associated with the
client device is being obscured by one or more other items currently being displayed
on the display screen; and

an obscured ad nag function that generates an obscured ad nag display in response to detection of the obscured ad condition, wherein the obscured ad nag display notifies the user of the obscured ad condition.

162. The software as set forth in Claim 161, wherein the obscured ad nag display further notifies the user that the obscured nag display will be generated upon each future occurrence of an obscured ad condition.

163. The software as set forth in Claim 162, wherein the obscured ad nag display further notifies the user that the user has the following choices:

remove whatever is obscuring the obscured advertisement;
maintain the status quo, so that every future occurrence of an obscured ad condition will result in the generation of the obscured ad nag display; and
switch the operating mode of the software from the first operating mode to either the second operating mode or the third operating mode.

164. The software as set forth in Claim 118, further comprising:

a software update check function that checks a prescribed website to determine availability of an update(s) to the software; and
a nag function that generates a software update nag display in response to a determination that an update(s) to the software is available, wherein the update(s) that the user is entitled to vary depending upon which operating mode is currently activated.

165. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the advertisement distribution server system includes:

at least one ad server, each of which stores at least one of a plurality of advertisements to be downloaded; and

at least one playlist server each of which stores at least one playlist each of
6 which contains a list of the plurality of advertisements to be downloaded, and the
address of the ad server where each listed advertisement is stored.

166. The software as set forth in Claim 165, wherein the at least one playlist
2 server is controlled by a vendor of the software.

167. The software as set forth in Claim 165, wherein the at least one ad server
2 comprises a plurality of ad servers that each store one or more advertisements to be
distributed to the client device.

168. The software as set forth in Claim 165, wherein:
2 the at least one playlist server is controlled by a vendor of the software; and
the at least one ad server comprises a plurality of ad servers that each store
4 one or more advertisements to be distributed to clients of the vendor of the software;
and
6 at least one of the plurality of ad servers is controlled by the vendor of the
software.

169. The software as set forth in Claim 165, wherein:
2 the at least one playlist server is controlled by a vendor of the software; and
the at least one ad server comprises a plurality of ad servers that each store
4 one or more advertisements to be distributed to clients of the vendor of the software;
and
6 at least one of the plurality of ad servers is controlled by an entity other than
the vendor of the software that has granted the vendor of the software and its clients
8 access to its ad server(s).

170. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:

an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on a storage medium associated with the client device; and
an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of the stored advertisements.

171. The software as set forth in Claim 170, wherein the advertisement display function displays the stored advertisements in a linear manner.

172. The software as set forth in Claim 170, wherein the advertisement display function displays the stored advertisements in a random manner.

173. The software as set forth in Claim 170, wherein the advertisement display function displays the stored advertisements in a linear sequence according to the order in which the advertisements are stored on the storage medium.

174. The software as set forth in Claim 170, wherein the advertisement display function displays the stored advertisements in an order prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system.

175. The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising an advertisement validation function that performs a validity check on each advertisement to be displayed and inhibits display of any advertisement determined to be invalid.

176. The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising an advertisement validation function that performs a validity check on at least some of the advertisements to be displayed and inhibits display of any advertisement determined to be invalid.

177. The software as set forth in Claim 170, wherein the storage medium
2 comprises a local cache memory associated with the client device.

178. The software as set forth in Claim 170, wherein the advertisement display
2 function displays the stored advertisements in accordance with ad display
parameters prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system.

179. The software as set forth in Claim 178, wherein the ad display parameters
2 are unknown to the e-mail service provider.

180. The software as set forth in Claim 178, wherein the ad display parameters
2 are prescribed by a vendor of the software.

181. The software as set forth in Claim 180, wherein the ad display parameters
2 are unknown to the e-mail service provider.

182. The software as set forth in Claim 178, further comprising a user activity
2 monitor function that monitors user activity, wherein:

at least one of the ad display parameters is a face time duration parameter that
4 specifies a face time duration for at least one of the advertisements;

the advertisement display function displays the at least one of the stored
6 advertisements for the face time duration prescribed by the associated face time
duration parameter; and

8 the face time duration comprises a time period during which the user activity
function detects at least a prescribed minimum level of user activity.

183. The software as set forth in Claim 182, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any user action that is indicative of user interaction with the software.

184. The software as set forth in Claim 182, wherein the user activity
comprises any user action that is indicative of the user viewing a display screen
associated with the client device.

185. The software as set forth in Claim 182, wherein the user activity
comprises any of the following user actions:
movement of a pointer device associated with the client device; and
use of an input device associated with the client device.

186. The software as set forth in 182, wherein the user activity comprises any
of the following user actions:
movement of a mouse associated with the client device;
clicking of a mouse button associated with the mouse; and
movement of one or more keys of a keyboard associated with the client
device.

187. The software as set forth in Claim 178, wherein the ad display parameters
include any one or more of the following parameters for each advertisement to be
displayed:
a maximum face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each
time that it is displayed;
a maximum cumulative face time that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;
the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to
be displayed;
the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed; and
the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed;

14 wherein the face time comprises a time period during which a prescribed
minimum level of user activity occurs.

2 188. The software as set forth in Claim 187, further comprising a user activity
monitor function that monitors user activity and detects whether the prescribed
minimum level of user activity has occurred.

2 189. The software as set forth in Claim 170, wherein the advertisement
download function downloads advertisements identified in a playlist generated by at
least one playlist server.

2 190. The software as set forth in Claim 189, further comprising a cookie
generator function that generates a cookie containing information describing
user/client device behavior and/or user demographics.

2 191. The software as set forth in claim 190, wherein the playlist is generated by
the at least one playlist server for the user/client device based at least partially on the
information contained in the cookie.

2 192. The software as set forth in claim 190, wherein the playlist is generated by
the at least one playlist server for the user/client device based at least partially on the
information contained in the playlist request.

2 193. The software as set forth in Claim 189, wherein the playlist is customized
to the user/client device.

2 194. The software as set forth in Claim 189, wherein the playlist is tailored to
the user/client device.

195. The software as set forth in Claim 189, wherein the playlist is generated
2 by the at least one playlist server based at least partially on user demographics
and/or user/client device behavior.

196. The software as set forth in Claim 189, wherein the at least one playlist
2 server is controlled by a vendor of the software.

197. The software as set forth in Claim 189, wherein the at least one playlist
2 server is inaccessible to the e-mail service provider.

198. The software as set forth in Claim 189, wherein the playlist is unavailable
2 to the e-mail service provider.

199. The software as set forth in Claim 198, wherein the at least one playlist
2 server is controlled by a vendor of the software.

200. The software as set forth in Claim 170, wherein the advertisement
2 download function includes a playlist fetch function that fetches a playlist from at
least one playlist server, wherein the playlist identifies the advertisements to be
4 downloaded by the advertisement download function.

201. The software as set forth in Claim 200, wherein:
2 the playlist fetch function checks the at least one playlist server, at prescribed
playlist check intervals, for an at least one new playlist; and
4 if an at least one new playlist is available, the playlist check function fetches
the at least one new playlist;
6 wherein the at least one new playlist identifies additional advertisements to be
downloaded by the advertisement download function.

202. The software as set forth in Claim 201, further comprising an ad deletion
2 function that deletes from the storage medium associated with the client device all
advertisements that are not identified in the at least one new playlist.

203. The software as set forth in Claim 201, further comprising a playlist
2 merge function that merges the current playlist(s) and the at least one new playlist.

204. The software as set forth in Claim 201, wherein the prescribed playlist
2 check intervals span a plurality of online e-mail sessions during which the client
device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

205. The software as set forth in Claim 201, wherein the at least one playlist
2 server specifies the prescribed playlist check intervals.

206. The software as set forth in Claim 205, wherein:

2 the at least one playlist server specifies a playback mode for displaying the
stored advertisements; and

4 the playback mode being either a first playback mode in which the
advertisement display function displays the stored advertisements a linear sequence
6 according to the order in which the advertisements are stored on the storage
medium, or a second playback mode in which the advertisement display function
8 displays the stored advertisements in a random sequence.

207. The software as set forth in Claim 201, wherein the advertisement storage
2 function either mixes the additional advertisements and at least selected ones of the
previously stored advertisements, or stores the additional advertisements as a
4 contiguous block, in response to an instruction received from the at least one playlist
server.

208. The software as set forth in Claim 201, wherein the advertisement display
2 function either displays the additional advertisements and at least selected ones of
the previously stored advertisements in a mixed manner, or displays the additional
4 advertisements as a contiguous block, in response to an instruction received from the
at least one playlist server.

209. The software as set forth in Claim 201, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist specifies the prescribed playlist check intervals between receipt of the at least
one new playlist and receipt of a next at least one new playlist.

210. The software as set forth in Claim 201, wherein the advertisement storage
2 function one of replaces the currently stored advertisements with the additional
advertisements, or merges the additional advertisements with the currently stored
4 advertisements, in accordance with an instruction included in the at least one new
playlist.

211. The software as set forth in Claim 200, wherein the advertisement display
2 function displays the stored advertisements in one of a linear and random manner, as
specified by the at least one playlist server.

212. The software as set forth in Claim 200, wherein:
2 the at least one playlist server specifies a playback mode for displaying the
stored advertisements; and
4 the playback mode being either a first playback mode in which the
advertisement display function displays the stored advertisements a linear sequence
6 according to the order in which the advertisements are stored on the storage
medium, or a second playback mode in which the advertisement display function
8 displays the stored advertisements in a random sequence.

213. The software as set forth in Claim 200, wherein the advertisement display
2 function displays the stored advertisements in one of a linear and random manner, as
specified by the playlist.

214. The software as set forth in Claim 213, wherein the advertisement display
2 function displays the additional advertisements in one of a linear and random
manner, as specified by the at least one new playlist.

215. The software as set forth in Claim 200, wherein the advertisement
2 download function further includes an ad fetch function that fetches the
advertisements identified in the playlist.

216. The software as set forth in Claim 215, wherein the ad fetch function
2 fetches the advertisements identified in the playlist over two or more advertisement
download sessions.

217. The software as set forth in Claim 215, wherein the ad fetch function
2 fetches the advertisements identified in the playlist over one or more advertisement
download sessions.

218. The software as set forth in Claim 217, wherein the one or more
2 advertisement download sessions coincide with the selected advertisement
download times.

219. The software as set forth in Claim 217, wherein each of the one or more
2 advertisement download sessions is limited to a prescribed maximum duration.

220. The software as set forth in Claim 217, wherein the advertisement
2 download function further includes an ad fetch timer function that limits the

duration of each advertisement download session to a prescribed maximum time
4 period.

221. The software as set forth in Claim 217, wherein the selected advertisement
2 download times coincide with times when the client device is online for the purpose
of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

222. The software as set forth in Claim 217, wherein the selected advertisement
2 download times coincide with times when the client device is online for a purpose
other than for sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

223. The software as set forth in Claim 200, wherein the advertisement display
2 function controls the display of the stored advertisements in accordance with ad
display parameters contained in the playlist.

224. The software as set forth in Claim 223, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include at least one of the following:

the maximum time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed each time
4 that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that each stored advertisement is to be
6 displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that each stored advertisement is to be
8 displayed;

the start date/time before which each stored advertisement should not be
10 displayed; and

the end date/time after which each stored advertisement should not be
12 displayed.

225. The software as set forth in Claim 223, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include at least two of the following parameters:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each
4 time that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be
6 displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to
8 be displayed;

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
2 displayed; and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
4 displayed.

226. The software as set forth in Claim 223, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each
4 time that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be
6 displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to
8 be displayed;

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
10 displayed; and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
12 displayed.

227. The software as set forth in Claim 223, further comprising a user activity
2 monitor function that monitors user activity, wherein:

at least one of the ad display parameters is a face time duration parameter that
4 specifies a face time duration for at least one of the advertisements;

the advertisement display function displays the at least one of the stored
6 advertisements for the face time duration prescribed by the associated face time
duration parameter; and

8 the face time duration comprises a time period during which the user activity
function detects at least a prescribed minimum level of user activity.

228. The software as set forth in Claim 227, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any user action that is indicative of user interaction with the software.

229. The software as set forth in Claim 227, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any user action that is indicative of the user viewing a display screen
associated with the client device.

230. The software as set forth in Claim 227, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any of the following user actions:

movement of a pointer device associated with the client device; and
4 use of an input device associated with the client device.

231. The software as set forth in 227, wherein the user activity comprises any
2 of the following user actions:

movement of a mouse associated with the client device;
4 clicking of a mouse button associated with the mouse; and
movement of one or more keys of a keyboard associated with the client
6 device.

232. The software as set forth in Claim 223, wherein the ad display parameters include any one or more of the following parameters for each advertisement to be displayed:

a maximum face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is displayed;

a maximum cumulative face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed; and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;

wherein the face time comprises a time period during a prescribed minimum level of user activity occurs.

233. The software as set forth in Claim 232, further comprising a user activity monitor function that monitors user activity and detects whether the prescribed minimum level of user activity has occurred.

234. The software as set forth in Claim 223, wherein the ad display parameters include any two or more of the following parameters for each advertisement to be displayed:

a maximum face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is displayed;

a maximum cumulative face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

10 the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed; and

12 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed;

14 wherein the face time comprises a time period during a prescribed minimum
level of user activity occurs.

235. The software as set forth in Claim 234, further comprising a user activity
2 monitor function that monitors user activity and detects whether the prescribed
minimum level of user activity has occurred.

236. The software as set forth in Claim 200, wherein the advertisement display
2 function controls the display of the stored advertisements at least partially based on
monitored user activity.

237. The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising a user activity
2 monitor function that monitors user activity and generates user activity information,
wherein the advertisement display function controls the display of advertisements at
4 least partially based on the user activity information.

238. The software as set forth in Claim 237, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any user action that is indicative of user interaction with the software.

239. The software as set forth in Claim 237, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any user action that is indicative of the user viewing a display screen
associated with the client device.

240. The software as set forth in Claim 237, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any of the following user actions:

movement of a pointer device associated with the client device; and
use of an input device associated with the client device.

241. The software as set forth in 237, wherein the user activity comprises any
of the following user actions:

movement of a mouse associated with the client device;
clicking of a mouse button associated with the mouse; and
movement of one or more keys of a keyboard associated with the client
device.

242. The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising:

an obscured ad monitor function that determines whether an obscured ad
condition has occurred, whereby the obscured ad condition occurs when an
advertisement currently being displayed on a display screen associated with the
client device is being obscured by one or more other items currently being displayed
on the display screen; and

an obscured ad nag function that generates an obscured ad nag display in
response to detection of the obscured ad condition, wherein the obscured ad nag
display notifies the user of the obscured ad condition.

243. The software as set forth in Claim 242, wherein the obscured ad nag
display further notifies the user that the obscured nag display will be generated upon
each future occurrence of an obscured ad condition.

244. The software as set forth in Claim 242, wherein the obscured ad nag
display further notifies the user that the obscured nag display will be generated upon
each future occurrence of an obscured ad condition.

245. The software as set forth in Claim 244, wherein the obscured ad nag
2 display further notifies the user that the user has the following choices:
remove whatever is obscuring the obscured advertisement;
4 maintain the status quo, so that every future occurrence of an obscured ad
condition will result in the generation of the obscured ad nag display; and
6 switch the operating mode of the software from the first operating mode to
the second operating mode.

246. The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising an audit
2 function that compiles ad-related statistical data relating to downloaded
advertisements.

247. The software as set forth in Claim 246, further comprising an audit data
2 transmit function that transmits the ad-related statistical data to a prescribed server.

248. The software as set forth in Claim 247, wherein the ad-related statistical
2 data facilitates analysis of the effectiveness of the software regarding presentation of
advertisements to the user.

249. The software as set forth in Claim 247, wherein the audit data transmit
2 function is activated in response to a send audit data request transmitted by the
prescribed server.

250. The software as set forth in Claim 249, wherein:
2 the prescribed server includes an auditing manager function; and
the auditing manager function generates the send audit data request in
4 accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
transmitted to a statistical sampling of a population of client devices, at prescribed
6 times.

251. The software as set forth in Claim 249, wherein:

2 the prescribed server includes an auditing manager function; and

the auditing manager function generates the send audit data request in
4 accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
transmitted to random ones of a population of client devices, at prescribed times.

252. The software as set forth in Claim 247, wherein:

2 the audit data transmit function generates a send audit data display window
that requests the user's permission to transmit the ad-related statistical data to the
4 prescribed server; and

the audit data transmit function transmits the ad-related statistical data only
6 in response to a user's grant of permission to do so.

253. The software as set forth in Claim 246, wherein the ad-related statistical
2 data includes display event-related data regarding each advertisement that was
displayed during a prescribed audit interval.

254. The software as set forth in Claim 253, wherein the ad-related statistical
2 data is maintained as a log that is rotated at prescribed rollover intervals.

255. The software as set forth in Claim 253, wherein the display event-related
2 data includes display time data for each advertisement that was displayed during the
prescribed audit interval.

256. The software as set forth in Claim 255, wherein the ad-related statistical
2 data further includes clickthrough data regarding each advertisement that was
clicked on by the user during the prescribed audit interval.

257. The software as set forth in Claim 246, wherein the ad-related statistical
2 data is maintained as a log that is rotated at prescribed rollover intervals.

258. The software as set forth in Claim 257, wherein:
2 the prescribed rollover intervals correspond to prescribed audit intervals; and
the ad-related statistical data includes display event-related data regarding
4 each advertisement that was displayed during a current one of the prescribed audit
intervals.

259. The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising an audit
2 function that compiles audit data that includes user demographic data, software
usage data regarding usage of the software by the user, ad-related statistical data,
4 features of the software used by the user, and user-selected settings.

260. The software as set forth in Claim 259, further comprising an audit data
2 transmit function that transmits the audit data to a prescribed server.

261. The software as set forth in Claim 260, wherein:
2 the audit data transmit function generates a send audit data display window
that requests the user's permission to transmit the audit data to the prescribed server;
4 and
the audit data transmit function transmits the audit data only in response to a
6 user's grant of permission to do so.

262. The software as set forth in Claim 260, wherein:
2 the audit data transmit function generates a send audit data display window
that requests the user's permission to transmit each category of the audit data to the
4 prescribed server; and

the audit data transmit function then transmits only the category(ies) of the
audit data for which the user has granted permission to transmit.

263. The software as set forth in Claim 260, wherein the audit data transmit
function is activated in response to a send audit data request transmitted by the
prescribed server.

264. The software as set forth in Claim 263, wherein:
the prescribed server includes an auditing manager function; and
the auditing manager function generates the send audit data request in
accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
transmitted to a statistical sampling of a population of client devices, at prescribed
times.

265. The software as set forth in Claim 263, wherein:
the prescribed server includes an auditing manager function; and
the auditing manager function generates the send audit data request in
accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
transmitted to random ones of a population of client devices, at prescribed times.

267. The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising an audit
function that compiles audit data that includes user demographic data, software
usage data regarding usage of the software by the user, and ad-related statistical
data.

268. The software as set forth in Claim 267, wherein the audit data is
maintained as a log that is rotated at prescribed rollover intervals.

269. The software as set forth in Claim 267, wherein the ad-related statistical
2 data includes display event-related data regarding each advertisement that was
displayed during a prescribed audit interval.

270. The software as set forth in Claim 269, wherein the display event-related
2 data includes display time data for each advertisement that was displayed during the
prescribed audit interval.

271. The software as set forth in Claim 270, wherein the ad-related statistical
2 data further includes clickthrough data regarding each advertisement that was
clicked on by the user during the prescribed audit interval.

272. The software as set forth in Claim 269, wherein the ad-related statistical
2 data is maintained as a log that is rotated at prescribed rollover intervals.

273. The software as set forth in Claim 267, further comprising an audit data
2 transmit function that transmits the audit data to a prescribed server associated with
the advertisement distribution server system.

274. The software as set forth in Claim 273, wherein:
2 the audit data transmit function generates a send audit data display window
that requests the user's permission to transmit the audit data to the prescribed server;
4 and

the audit data transmit function transmits the audit data only in response to a
6 user's grant of permission to do so.

275. The software as set forth in Claim 273, wherein:

2 the audit data transmit function generates a send audit data display window
that requests the user's permission to transmit each category of the audit data to the
4 prescribed server; and

the audit data transmit function then transmits only the category(ies) of the
6 audit data for which the user has granted permission to transmit.

276. The software as set forth in Claim 273, wherein the audit data transmit
2 function is activated in response to a send audit data request transmitted by the
prescribed server.

277. The software as set forth in Claim 276, wherein:

2 the prescribed server includes an auditing manager function; and

the auditing manager function generates the send audit data request in
4 accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
transmitted to a statistical sampling of a population of client devices, at prescribed
6 times.

278. The software as set forth in Claim 276, wherein:

2 the prescribed server includes an auditing manager function; and

the auditing manager function generates the send audit data request in
4 accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
transmitted to random ones of a population of client devices, at prescribed times.

279. The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising an ad link
2 history function that generates an ad link history display window that lists links to
the sources of advertisements that have previously been displayed.

280. The software as set forth in Claim 279, wherein the ad link history
2 window is selectively viewable by the user.

281. The software as set forth in Claim 280, wherein the communications
function automatically connects the client device to a source of the advertisement
corresponding to a selected link in response to a prescribed user action, if the client
device is online at that time.

282. The software as set forth in Claim 281, wherein the prescribed user action
comprises a double-click on the selected link.

283. The software as set forth in Claim 280, wherein the advertisement display
function automatically displays the advertisement corresponding to a selected link in
response to a prescribed user action.

284. The software as set forth in Claim 283, wherein the prescribed user action
comprises a single-click on the selected link.

285. The software as set forth in Claim 280, wherein:
the communications function automatically connects the client device to a
source of the advertisement corresponding to a selected link in response to a first
prescribed user action, if the client device is online at that time; and
the advertisement display function automatically displays the advertisement
corresponding to a selected link in response to a second prescribed user action.

286. The software as set forth in Claim 285, wherein:
the first prescribed user action comprises a double-click on the selected link;
and
the second prescribed user action comprises a single-click on the selected link.

287. The software as set forth in Claim 286, further comprising an offline ad
dialog function that generates an offline ad dialog display in response to the first

prescribed user action, wherein the offline ad dialog display presents the user with at least two options, including a first option which is to invoke the communications function to effect a connection to the source of the advertisement corresponding to the selected link, and a second option which is to bookmark the selected link.

288. The software as set forth in Claim 287, wherein the offline ad dialog display further presents the user with a third option, which is to bookmark the selected link and to be reminded of this next time the client device goes online.

289. The software as set forth in Claim 279, wherein the ad link history display window further lists links to the sources of advertisements that the user has previously visited.

290. The software as set forth in Claim 289, wherein:
the communications function automatically connects the client device to a source of the advertisement corresponding to a selected link in response to a first prescribed user action, if the client device is online at that time; and
the advertisement display function automatically displays the advertisement corresponding to a selected link in response to a second prescribed user action.

291. The software as set forth in Claim 290, wherein:
the first prescribed user action comprises a double-click on the selected link;
and
the second prescribed user action comprises a single-click on the selected link.

292. The software as set forth in Claim 291, further comprising an offline ad dialog function that generates an offline ad dialog display in response to the first prescribed user action, wherein the offline ad dialog display presents the user with at least two options, including a first option which is to invoke the communications

function to effect a connection to the source of the advertisement corresponding to the selected link, and a second option which is to bookmark the selected link.

293. The software as set forth in Claim 292, wherein the offline ad dialog display further presents the user with a third option, which is to bookmark the selected link and to be reminded of this next time the client device goes online.

294. The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising:

a playlist request function that generates a playlist request that includes a current playlist(s) ID that identifies a current playlist(s);

a playlist request transmit function that transmits the playlist request to at least one playlist server; and

a playlist response handling function that receives and processes a playlist response generated by the at least one playlist server in response to the playlist request;

wherein the playlist response includes an at least one new playlist that includes a plurality of ad identifiers that identify corresponding advertisements, a plurality of addresses that identify the source of respective ones of the advertisements, and at least one new playlist ID that identifies the at least one new playlist.

295. The software as set forth in Claim 281, wherein the at least one playlist server is controlled by a vendor of the software.

296. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the advertisement distribution system includes:

at least one ad server, each of which stores at least one of a plurality of advertisements to be downloaded; and

the at least one playlist server.

297. The software as set forth in Claim 296, wherein the at least one playlist
2 server is controlled by a vendor of the software.

298. The software as set forth in Claim 296, wherein the at least one ad server
2 comprises a plurality of ad servers that each store one or more advertisements to be
distributed to the client device.

299. The software as set forth in Claim 296, wherein:
2 the at least one playlist server is controlled by a vendor of the software; and
the at least one ad server comprises a plurality of ad servers that each store
4 one or more advertisements to be distributed to clients of the vendor of the software;
and
6 at least one of the plurality of ad servers is controlled by the vendor of the
software.

300. The software as set forth in Claim 296, wherein:
2 the at least one playlist server is controlled by a vendor of the software; and
the at least one ad server comprises a plurality of ad servers that each store
4 one or more advertisements to be distributed to clients of the vendor of the software;
and
6 at least one of the plurality of ad servers is controlled by an entity other than
the vendor of the software that has granted the vendor of the software and its clients
8 access to its ad server(s).

301. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein:
2 the communication network comprises the Internet;
the at least one playlist server is associated with the advertisement
4 distribution server system; and

the advertisement distribution server system and the at least one playlist
6 server are connected to the Internet.

302. The software as set forth in Claim 301, wherein:

2 the sources of the respective ones of the advertisements identified by the ad
identifiers in the at least one new playlist comprise storage locations on at least one
4 ad server that is associated with the advertisement distribution server system; and

the addresses that identify the sources of the respective ones of the
6 advertisements identified by the ad identifiers in the at least one new playlist
comprise URIs.

303. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein:

2 the playlist response includes a client information portion that includes a
playlist handling command having a first state or a second state;

4 the playlist response handling function replaces the current playlist(s) with
the at least one new playlist in response to the first state of the playlist handling
6 command; and

the playlist response handling function merges the current playlist(s) with the
8 at least one new playlist in response to the second state of the playlist handling
command.

304. The software as set forth in Claim 303, wherein the playlist request
2 transmit function transmits the playlist request to the at least one playlist server at
prescribed playlist check intervals.

305. The software as set forth in Claim 304, wherein the client information
2 portion of the playlist response further includes a playlist request interval data field
that specifies the prescribed playlist check interval.

306. The software as set forth in Claim 305, wherein the prescribed playlist
2 check intervals span a plurality of online e-mail sessions during which the client
device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

307. The software as set forth in Claim 305, wherein the client information
2 portion of the playlist response further includes an ad history interval data field that
specifies the time period for which the software must remember that it displayed a
4 particular advertisement.

308. The software as set forth in Claim 307, wherein the client information
2 portion of the playlist response further includes an ad display sequence data field
that specifies whether the advertisement display function should select
4 advertisements for display in a linear or random manner.

309. The software as set forth in Claim 308, wherein the client information
2 portion of the playlist response further includes an ad display window data field that
specifies the dimensions of an ad display window on a display screen associated
4 with the client device within which the advertisements are to be displayed.

310. The software as set forth in Claim 309, wherein:
2 the stored advertisements include a plurality of regular ads and at least one
runout ad; and
4 the client information portion of the playlist response further includes a
display time quota field that specifies the maximum display time that the
6 advertisement display function should display the regular ads before displaying the
at least one runout ad.

311. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein:

2 the advertisement display function only displays selected ones of the
advertisements identified in the current playlist(s) in response to the first state of the
4 playlist handling command; and

the advertisement display function displays selected ones of the
6 advertisements identified in both the current playlist(s) and the at least one new
playlist in response to the second state of the playlist handling command.

312. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein:

2 the playlist response includes a client information portion that includes a
playlist handling command having a first state or a second state;

4 the advertisement storage function replaces advertisements identified in the
current playlist(s) with the advertisements identified in the at least one new playlist
6 in response to the first state of the playlist handling command; and

the advertisement storage function merges the advertisements identified in
8 the current playlist(s) and the advertisements identified in the at least one new
playlist in response to the second state of the playlist handling command.

313. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist response
2 handling function compares the ad identifiers in the at least one new playlist and ad
identifiers in the current playlist(s), and generates a list of addresses that identify the
4 sources of advertisements corresponding to the ad identifiers in the at least one new
playlist that are not contained in the current playlist(s).

314. The software as set forth in Claim 313, further comprising an ad fetch
2 function that fetches the advertisements corresponding to the generated list of
addresses from the sources corresponding to the generated list of addresses.

315. The software as set forth in Claim 314, further comprising an ad fetch
2 function that fetches the advertisements corresponding to the generated list of

addresses from the sources corresponding to the generated list of addresses, over
4 two or more advertisement download sessions.

316. The software as set forth in Claim 315, wherein the selected advertisement
2 download times span a plurality of online e-mail sessions during which the client
device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

317. The software as set forth in Claim 316, wherein the playlist request
2 transmit function transmits the playlist request to the at least one playlist server at
prescribed playlist check intervals.

318. The software as set forth in Claim 317, wherein the playlist response
2 further includes a client information portion that includes a playlist request interval
data field that specifies the prescribed playlist check interval.

319. The software as set forth in Claim 318, wherein the prescribed playlist
2 check intervals span a plurality of online e-mail sessions during which the client
device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

320. The software as set forth in Claim 315, wherein the two or more
2 advertisement download sessions coincide with the selected advertisement
download times.

321. The software as set forth in Claim 320, wherein the selected advertisement
2 download times coincide with times when the client device is online for the purpose
of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

322. The software as set forth in Claim 315, wherein each advertisement
2 download session is limited to a prescribed maximum time duration.

323. The software as set forth in Claim 315, wherein the ad fetch function
2 further includes an ad fetch timer function that limits the duration of each
advertisement download session to a prescribed maximum time period.

324. The software as set forth in Claim 315, wherein the advertisement
2 download function does not mandate that the selected advertisement download
times have a one-to-one correspondence with times when the client device is online
4 for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

325. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist request
2 further includes a user data field that includes information identifying the software.

326. The software as set forth in Claim 325, wherein the user data field further
2 includes information identifying an operating platform of the client device on which
the software is running.

327. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist request
2 further includes usage data relating to the amount of time the user has used the
software over a prescribed most recent interval.

328. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist request
2 further includes a display time remaining data field that specifies the total amount of
display time required for the stored advertisements that remain to be displayed.

329. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist request
2 further includes a display time used recently data field that specifies the total amount
of times that advertisements were displayed during a prescribed latest time interval.

2 330. The software as set forth in Claim 329, wherein the prescribed latest time interval comprises the present day.

2 331. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist request further includes client device display screen data that specifies dimensions of a display screen associated with the client device.

2 332. The software as set forth in Claim 331, wherein the dimensions include the height, width, and depth of the display screen, in pixels.

2 333. The software as set forth in Claim 294, further comprising a custom installer function that generates a distributor ID that identifies a distributor that distributed the software for use on the client device.

2 334. The software as set forth in Claim 333, wherein the playlist request further includes the distributor ID.

2 335. The software as set forth in Claim 334, wherein the distributor ID is used in apportioning advertising revenue attributable to the software distributed by that distributor.

2 336. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist request further includes a list of the ad identifiers corresponding to advertisements that have been displayed in a prescribed recent time interval.

2 337. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist request transmit function transmits the playlist request to the at least one playlist server at prescribed playlist check intervals.

338. The software as set forth in Claim 337, wherein the playlist response
2 further includes a client information portion that includes a playlist request interval
data field that specifies the prescribed playlist check interval.

339. The software as set forth in Claim 338, wherein each of the prescribed
2 playlist check intervals correspond to the first time that the client device goes online
for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages subsequent to the lapse
4 of the current prescribed playlist check interval.

340. The software as set forth in Claim 338, wherein the prescribed playlist
2 check intervals span a plurality of online e-mail sessions during which the client
device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

341. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist response
2 further includes a client information portion that includes an ad history interval data
field that specifies the time period for which the software must remember that it
4 displayed a particular advertisement.

342. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist response
2 further includes a client information portion that includes an ad display sequence
data field that specifies whether the advertisement display function should select
4 advertisements for display in a linear or random manner.

343. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist response
2 further includes a client information portion that includes an ad display window
data field that specifies the dimensions of an ad display window on a display screen
4 associated with the client device within which the advertisements are to be
displayed.

344. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the stored advertisements
2 include a plurality of regular ads and at least one runout ad.

345. The software as set forth in Claim 344, wherein the playlist response
2 further includes a client information portion that includes a display time quota field
that specifies the maximum display time that the advertisement display function
4 should display the regular ads before displaying the at least one runout ad.

346. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist response
2 further includes a client information portion that contains instructions for the
software to control the manner in which the software obtains, handles, and displays
4 advertisements.

347. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes a mix/block data field that specifies whether the
advertisements identified in the at least one new playlist can be mixed with
4 previously-stored advertisements from other playlists, or must be displayed as a
block.

348. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes a block ad display sequence data field that specifies whether
the advertisement display function should select advertisements identified in the at
4 least one new playlist for display in a linear or random manner.

349. The software as set forth in Claim 347, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes a block ad display sequence data field that specifies whether
the advertisement display function should select advertisements identified in the at
4 least one new playlist for display in a linear or random manner.

350. The software as set forth in Claim 349, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes a user-friendly title of each of the advertisements identified
in the at least one new playlist.

351. The software as set forth in Claim 350, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes an ad type data field that specifies an ad type of each of the
advertisements identified in the at least one new playlist.

352. The software as set forth in Claim 350, wherein:
2 the at least one new playlist further includes an ad click URI for each of the
advertisements identified in the at least one new playlist; and
4 the ad click URI specifies a web page to be displayed in response to the user
clicking on the associated advertisement.

353. The software as set forth in Claim 294, further comprising a clickthrough
2 tracking function that, in response to the user clicking on a displayed advertisement,
appends a clickbase URI to a URI associated with that displayed advertisement, to
4 thereby facilitate counting of the number of times that the user clicks on that
displayed advertisement.

354. The software as set forth in Claim 353, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes a clickbase data field that specifies the clickbase URI.

355. The software as set forth in Claim 353, wherein the clickbase URI
2 designates a web page associated with the advertisement distribution server system.

356. The software as set forth in Claim 355, wherein the web page designated
2 by the clickbase URI is administered by a vendor of the software.

357. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes a user-friendly title of each of the advertisements identified
in the at least one new playlist.

358. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes an ad type data field that specifies an ad type of each of the
advertisements identified in the at least one new playlist.

359. The software as set forth in Claim 358, wherein the ad type is one of a
2 regular ad, a runout ad, a toolbar button ad, or a sponsor placard ad.

360. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein:
2 the at least one new playlist further includes an ad click URI for each of the
advertisements identified in the at least one new playlist; and
4 the ad click URI specifies a web page to be displayed in response to the user
clicking on the associated advertisement.

361. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes a plurality of ad display parameters for controlling the
manner in which the advertisement display function displays the stored
4 advertisements.

362. The software as set forth in Claim 361, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include at least one of the following parameters for each of the advertisements
identified in the at least one new playlist:

4 the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each
time that it is displayed;

6 the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to
be displayed;

10 the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed; and

12 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed.

363. The software as set forth in Claim 361, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include at least two of the following parameters for each of the advertisements
identified in the at least one new playlist:

4 the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each
time that it is displayed;

6 the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to
be displayed;

10 the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed; and

12 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed.

364. The software as set forth in Claim 361, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include:

4 the maximum time that an associated advertisement is to be displayed each
time that it is displayed;

6 the maximum cumulative time that an associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the maximum number of times per day that an associated advertisement is to
be displayed;

the start date/time before which an associated advertisement should not be
10 displayed; and

the end date/time after which an associated advertisement should not be
2 displayed.

365. The software as set forth in Claim 361, wherein the ad display parameters
2 are not supplied to the e-mail service provider.

366. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist includes a plurality of new playlists.

367. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist includes at least one new playlist for relatively long-lived advertisements,
and at least one new playlist for relatively short-lived advertisements.

368. The software as set forth in Claim 294, further comprising a user activity
2 monitor function that monitors user activity.

369. The software as set forth in Claim 368, wherein the at least one new
2 playlist further includes a plurality of ad display parameters for controlling the
manner in which the advertisement display function displays the stored
4 advertisements.

370. The software as set forth in Claim 369, wherein:
2 at least one of the ad display parameters is a face time duration parameter that
specifies a face time duration for at least one of the advertisements;
4 the advertisement display function displays the at least one of the stored
advertisements for the face time duration prescribed by the associated face time
6 duration parameter; and

the face time duration comprises a time period during which the user activity
8 function detects at least a prescribed minimum level of user activity.

371. The software as set forth in Claim 370, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any user action that is indicative of user interaction with the software.

372. The software as set forth in Claim 370, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any user action that is indicative of the user viewing a display screen
associated with the client device.

373. The software as set forth in Claim 370, wherein the user activity
2 comprises any of the following user actions:
movement of a pointer device associated with the client device; and
4 use of an input device associated with the client device.

374. The software as set forth in 370, wherein the user activity comprises any
2 of the following user actions:
movement of a mouse associated with the client device;
4 clicking of a mouse button associated with the mouse; and
movement of one or more keys of a keyboard associated with the client
6 device.

375. The software as set forth in Claim 369, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include any one or more of the following parameters for each advertisement
identified in the at least one new playlist:
4 a maximum face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each
time that it is displayed;
6 a maximum cumulative face time that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to
be displayed;

10 the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed; and

12 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be
displayed;

14 wherein the face time comprises a time period during which a prescribed
minimum level of user activity occurs.

2 376. The software as set forth in Claim 375, further comprising a user activity
monitor function that monitors user activity and detects whether the prescribed
minimum level of user activity has occurred.

2 377. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
playlist is customized to the user/client device.

2 378. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
playlist is tailored to the user/client device.

2 379. The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the at least one new
playlist is generated by the at least one playlist server based at least partially on user
demographics and/or user/client device behavior.

2 380. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:
an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on
a storage medium within the client device; and
4 an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of
the stored advertisements when the client device is offline.

381. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:

2 an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on
a storage medium within the client device; and
4 an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of
the stored advertisements when the client device is offline with respect to the e-mail
6 service provider server system.

382. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:

2 an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on
a storage medium associated with the client device; and
4 an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of
the stored advertisements

6 wherein:

the software includes at least two operating modes, including a first operating
8 mode in which the advertisement display function is activated, and a second
operating mode in which the advertisement display function is not activated;

10 the software includes a first set of e-mail features when operating in the first
operating mode, and a second set of e-mail features when operating in the second
12 operating mode, wherein the first set of e-mail features is greater than the second set
of e-mail features.

383. The software as set forth in Claim 382, further comprising:

2 an advertisement display monitor function that is activated when the software
is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement display monitor function
4 determines whether or not an ad display failure condition has occurred, whereby the
ad display failure condition occurs when the advertisement display function has not
6 successfully displayed at least a prescribed minimum number of advertisements over
a prescribed time period; and

8 an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad display failure condition has
10 occurred, whereupon the adware failure nag function generates an adware nag
failure display that notifies the user that the ad display failure condition has
12 occurred, and that warns the user that the operating mode of the software will be
switched from the first operating mode to the second operating mode if the ad
14 display failure condition is not rectified.

2 384. The software as set forth in Claim 383, further comprising a mode
switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

2 385. The software as set forth in Claim 382, further comprising:

2 an advertisement display monitor function that is activated when the software
is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement display monitor function
4 determines whether or not an ad display failure condition has occurred, whereby the
ad display failure condition occurs when the advertisement display function has not
6 successfully displayed at least a prescribed minimum number of advertisements over
a prescribed time period; and

8 an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad display failure condition has
10 occurred, whereupon the adware failure nag function generates an adware nag
failure display at prescribed ad failure nag intervals, wherein the adware nag failure
12 display notifies the user that the ad display failure condition has occurred, and
warns the user that the operating mode of the software will be switched from the
14 first operating mode to the second operating mode if the ad display failure condition
is not rectified.

386. The software as set forth in Claim 385, wherein the prescribed ad failure
2 nag intervals decrease over a time span between the initial detection of the ad display
failure condition and the expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

387. The software as set forth in Claim 386, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

388. The software as set forth in Claim 386, further comprising:
2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode
4 switch alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from
the first operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes
6 corrective action to rectify the ad display failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take corrective action in
response to the mode switch alert display.

389. The software as set forth in Claim 385, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

390. The software as set forth in Claim 385, further comprising:
2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
4 alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first

operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes corrective action
6 to rectify the ad display failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take corrective action in
response to the mode switch alert display.

391. The software as set forth in Claim 382, further comprising:

2 an advertisement display monitor function that is activated when the software
is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement display monitor function
4 determines whether or not an ad display failure condition has occurred, whereby the
ad display failure condition occurs when the advertisement display function has not
6 successfully displayed at least a prescribed minimum number of advertisements over
a prescribed time period;

8 an e-mail function monitor function that determines whether or not an e-mail
function failure condition has occurred, whereby the e-mail failure condition occurs
10 when the software has not successfully sent and/or received e-mail messages over
the prescribed time period; and

12 an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad display failure condition has occurred
14 and an e-mail function failure condition has not occurred,, whereupon the adware
failure nag function generates an adware nag failure display that notifies the user
16 that advertisements have not been successfully displayed, and that warns the user
that the operating mode of the software will be switched from the first operating
18 mode to the second operating mode if the ad display failure condition is not rectified.

392. The software as set forth in Claim 391, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode upon expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time
4 period.

393. The software as set forth in Claim 391, further comprising:

2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
4 alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first
operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes corrective action
6 to rectify the ad display failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take corrective action in
response to the mode switch alert display.

394. The software as set forth in Claim 382, further comprising:

2 an advertisement display monitor function that is activated when the software
is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement display monitor function
4 determines whether or not an ad display failure condition has occurred, whereby the
ad display failure condition occurs when the advertisement display function has not
6 successfully displayed at least a prescribed number of advertisements over a
prescribed time period;

8 an e-mail function monitor function that determines whether or not an e-mail
function failure condition has occurred, whereby the e-mail failure condition occurs
10 when the software has not successfully sent and/or received e-mail messages over
the prescribed time period; and

12 an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the
first operating mode upon detection that an ad display failure condition has occurred
14 and an e-mail function failure condition has not occurred,, whereupon the adware
failure nag function generates an adware nag failure display at prescribed ad failure
16 nag intervals, wherein the adware nag failure display notifies the user that
advertisements have not been successfully displayed, and warns the user that the
18 operating mode of the software will be switched from the first operating mode to the
second operating mode if the ad display failure condition is not rectified.

395. The software as set forth in Claim 394, wherein the prescribed ad failure
2 nag intervals decrease over a time span between the initial detection of the ad display
failure condition and the expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

396. The software as set forth in Claim 395, further comprising a mode
2 switching function that switches the software from the first operating
mode to the second operating mode upon expiration of the prescribed
4 maximum ad failure time period.

397. The software as set forth in Claim 394, further comprising:
2 a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon
expiration of a prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch
4 alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first
operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes corrective action
6 to rectify the ad display failure condition; and
a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating
8 mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take corrective action in
response to the mode switch alert display.

398. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:
2 an audit function that compiles ad-related statistical data relating to
downloaded advertisements; and
4 an audit data transmit function that transmits the ad-related statistical data to
a prescribed server.

399. The software as set forth in Claim 398, wherein the prescribed server is
2 associated with the advertisement distribution server system.

2 400. The software as set forth in Claim 398, wherein the prescribed server is associated with a vendor of the software.

2 401. The software as set forth in Claim 398, wherein the prescribed server is associated with a producer of the software.

2 402. The software as set forth in Claim 398, wherein the audit data transmit function is randomly activated.

2 403. The software as set forth in Claim 398, wherein the audit data transmit function is activated at random times.

2 404. The software as set forth in Claim 398, wherein the audit data transmit function is activated in a random manner.

2 405. The software as set forth in Claim 398, wherein the audit function compiles audit data comprising:
4 user demographic data;
4 software usage data regarding usage of the software by the user;
ad-related statistical data;
6 features of the software used by the user; and
user-selected settings.

2 406. The software as set forth in Claim 405, wherein the prescribed server is associated with the advertisement distribution server system.

2 407. The software as set forth in Claim 405, wherein the prescribed server is associated with a vendor of the software.



408. The software as set forth in Claim 405, wherein the prescribed server is
2 associated with a producer of the software.

409. The software as set forth in Claim 405, wherein the prescribed server is
2 under the control of a vendor of the software.

410. The software as set forth in Claim 405, wherein the prescribed server is
2 under the control of a producer of the software.

411. The software as set forth in Claim 405, wherein the audit data transmit
2 function is activated in a random manner.

412. The software as set forth in Claim 405, wherein the audit data transmit
2 function is activated at random times.

413. The software as set forth in Claim 405, wherein the audit data transmit
2 function is randomly activated.

414. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:
2 an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on
a storage medium associated with the client device;
4 an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of
the stored advertisements;
6 an audit function that compiles ad-related statistical data relating to displayed
advertisements; and
8 an audit data transmit function that transmits the ad-related statistical data to
a prescribed server.



2 415. The software as set forth in Claim 414, wherein the prescribed server is associated with the advertisement distribution server system.

2 416. The software as set forth in Claim 414, wherein the prescribed server is associated with a vendor of the software.

2 417. The software as set forth in Claim 414, wherein the prescribed server is associated with a producer of the software.

2 418. The software as set forth in Claim 414, wherein the prescribed server is under the control of a vendor of the software.

2 419. The software as set forth in Claim 414, wherein the prescribed server is under the control of a producer of the software.

2 420. The software as set forth in Claim 414, wherein the audit data transmit function is randomly activated.